

Research explores relationship-building program for male same-sex couples

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(Medical Xpress)—University of Cincinnati research couples found efforts at building communication skills very helpful in creating a sense of stability in their relationship and in [resolving conflict](#).

is examining the effectiveness of a relationship education program that was created to specifically address the needs of male same-sex couples. Details on the program and the study, led by Sarah Whitton, a UC assistant professor of psychology, will be presented Nov. 17, at the 46th annual convention of the Association of Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies (ABCT) in National Harbor, Md.

Whitton explains that same-sex [couples](#) and heterosexual couples share similar foundations for building successful relationships: commitment, communication and [conflict resolution](#).

However, same-sex couples are at heightened risk for breaking up, due to a number of issues including lack of social and community support, stress of discrimination and a lack of longstanding cultural norms for same-sex relationships.

"In reviewing relationship education programs, the core concepts were helpful, but they were heterosexually biased. For example, some communication patterns were explained in terms of [gender differences](#), which do not apply to same-sex couples," says Whitton. "As a result, the materials could be alienating and even distracting in assisting same-sex couples."

The researchers developed a relationship education program specifically for male, same-sex couples, first testing the program on a small number (12) of married or engaged male couples in Boston, where same-sex marriage had been legalized. The program is currently being tested again on 24 male couples in the Cincinnati area.

The program focused on the "3 C's" (commitment, communication, conflict resolution) of relationship building and was held over three sessions.

Feedback about the program indicated that the

"There's really no longtime role model for same-sex partnerships, which means that same-sex couples have a little more freedom in creating their relationship around how they want it to be. But that also means they have to work together and communicate, negotiate and share their ideas, their set of expectations, on what they want in their relationship. It is more likely than with [heterosexual couples](#) that they may have very different expectations, which can create problems," says Whitton.

Other researchers on the study are Brian A. Buzzella, a psychologist for the VA San Diego Healthcare System, and Amanda Kuryluk and Eliza Weitbrecht, both doctoral students in the University of Cincinnati psychology department.

Future research will focus on conducting a larger-scale study as well as launching a pilot program for female same-sex couples.

Provided by University of Cincinnati

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